

New ads want world to know: Life's swell in the Cities

From fish houses to Frida Kahlo exhibits, Minneapolis and St. Paul have a lot to offer: That's the message of a promotional campaign starting today, aimed first at metro citizenry and then the nation.

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Attention Twin Cities residents: A new public relations campaign touting Minneapolis-St. Paul is about to take off -- and its first target is you.

Starting today, local TV and radio stations will launch upbeat advertisements touting the outdoors, arts and general good life of the Cities. Electronic billboards are next. And after local residents have been transformed into "brand ambassadors" to folks visiting town, the national marketing campaign will begin.

It's part of a two-year, \$2.5 million campaign to put Minneapolis and St. Paul on the radar of national employers, workers, tourists and regular folks looking for a change of scenery. People unfamiliar with the Twin Cities think it's a boring, "economically deprived" area, according to a recent survey. The campaign is designed to change that.

"The world is full of lousy products with tremendous marketing. We have a tremendous product, but we need to take marketing more seriously," Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak said at a news conference Tuesday where the marketing strategy was presented.

St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman, also at the news conference, said most people don't realize the diversity of activities here.

"To be able to go from your deer stand to a Frida Kahlo exhibit in less than an hour, that's not common," Coleman said.

Three years in the making, the campaign came in response to a national survey conducted in 2003-04 showing that about half of the people unfamiliar with the Twin Cities felt there was "no reason to visit".

"People who don't know us think we are only about lakes, fishing, flannel shirts etc.," say fact sheets from the new "Minneapolis St. Paul More to Life" campaign. "They see the Cities as small, dull, white-bread, stoic and cold. Locals tend to perpetuate those stereotypes and many ... want to keep Minneapolis St. Paul 'under the radar.'"

Instead of flannel shirts and frigid weather, the Twin Cities should be known for vibrancy, a vast arts community, outdoor activities, smart residents, good schools and corporate opportunities, said Karen Gruenberg, a project leader for Meet Minneapolis, formerly the Minneapolis Convention and Visitors Bureau.

"The last time [such a campaign was undertaken] was when the Super Bowl was here in the early 1990s, but it was focused on the Super Bowl," said Gruenberg.

Telling America -- and Minnesotans -- about the richness of the community is not just to promote tourism, said Rybak. It's crucial to attract business and industry.

"Northwest and Delta may be in merger talks, and we want to compete for jobs," Rybak said. "Target can locate anywhere ... but we want them here."

Although the marketing promotes a united Minneapolis-St. Paul region, that doesn't mean each city won't be able to show off its unique flavor.

"We'll still have people's heads carved into butter, because that's who we are," joked Coleman, referring to the annual event involving Princess Kay of the Milky Way at the Minnesota State Fair.

Staff writer Tim Harlow contributed to this report.